

What's the PFUSs all about?

versus

PFAS, with the P from PANIC!

ENSO_r Conference, 21/10/2022

RCA

Who?

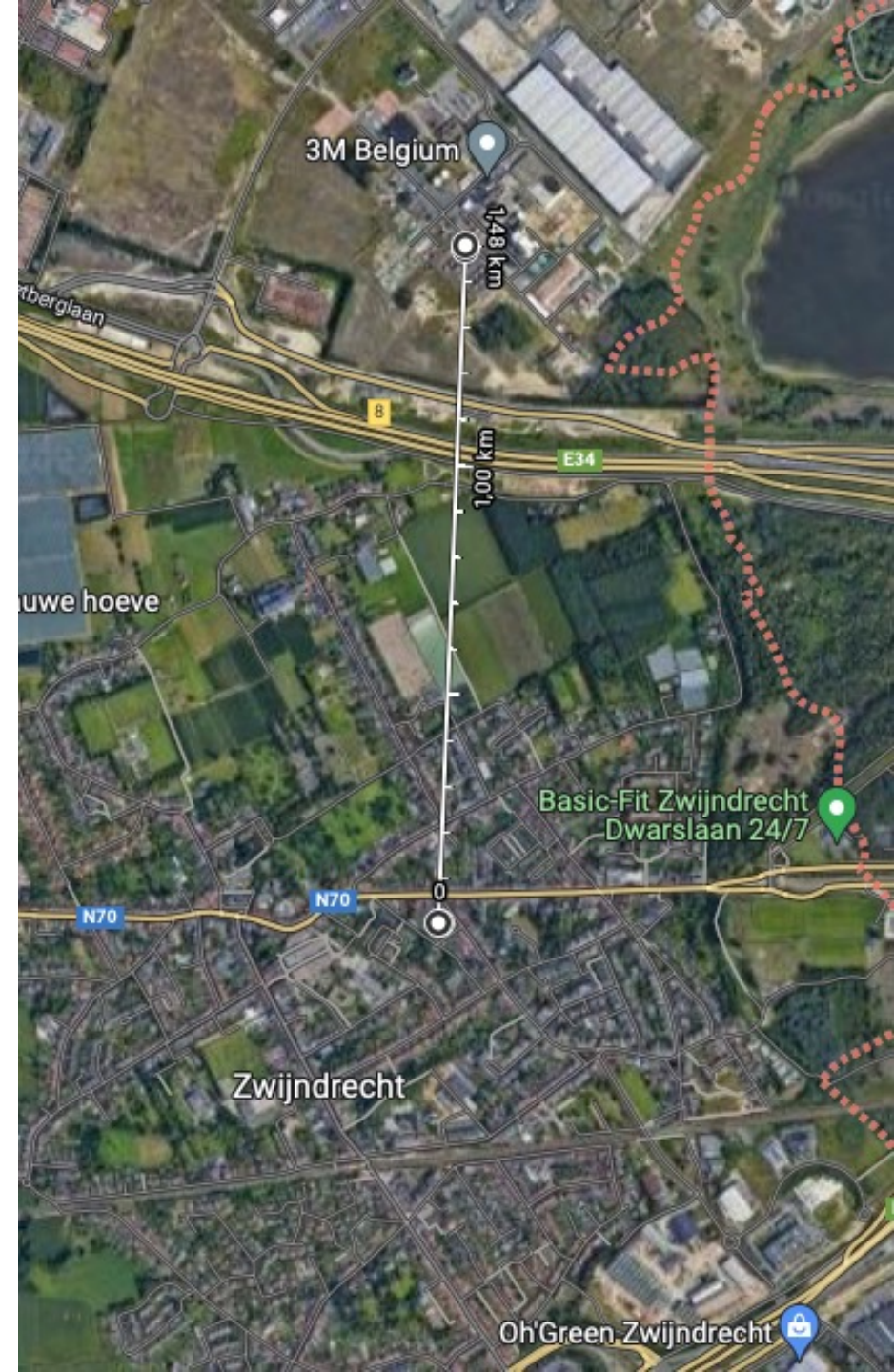
Jochem Goovaerts

- 20+years of experience in managing public, political and private crisis comms
- Working for PFAS Commissioner Karl Vrancken (Flemish Government) since day 1

Not just your average crisis

Communications context

- Whistleblower sets the tone
- Political and media storm, because directly linked to one of the biggest mobility works ever in Flanders (this project has been heavily contested for years, independant of PFAS) - Oosterweel
- Historical issue for 3M
- Local population and stakeholders are actively involved
- Not just Zwijndrecht, but all over Flanders (Belgium) (EU) (world)
- Parliamentary commission about (political) historical responsibilities
- Flemish goverment appoints PFAS Commissioner



Flemish Government appoints PFAS Commissioner on 14/06/21

- Mission:
 - **Science and expertise**
 - **Communication**
- **NOT**: judging about (political) responsibilities in the past

Not just your average crisis



Not just your average crisis

History (whistleblower)

Issue or incident

Take measures

Second/third/... 'storyline'

Interact with stakeholders

Stakeholders become equal party

Adapt policy

Build perspective

Return to business as usual

Prepare for new similar crises (forever chemicals a.o.)

Not just your average crisis

4 major points of concern:

- Pollution impacts environment (soil, ground water, crops, animals, eggs, ...) + PFAS is omni-present in our homes
- PFAS is impacting our health
- Anger, because the government failed to protect us (+ a lot of indications that 'they' might have been aware for years)
- What does this mean for the Oosterweel works?

Not just your average crisis

This is a crisis of trust
(in government and policy)

The challenge

Messaging =

{ (complexity) vs (need to simplify)
(severity & impact) vs (how worried should I be?) }

Emotion vs. ratio

Official vs 'others'

Victims

The challenge

- Multiple parties with their own agenda – often question official communication and science, aiming at blocking the Oosterweel project, not so much solution oriented, etc. – playing at the lack of trust in the government
- Attitude of 3M: denying any responsibility, statements on ‘no link’ between health issues and PFAS, on sort and degree of emissions, ...
 - Changed somewhat over time
- Progressive insight (science, available data and measurements, health, ...)
- Finding balance between *‘We are all going to die’* and *‘PFAS is completely harmless’*

The challenge

Messaging =



Communication by the PFAS Commissioner

Transparency

Frequency

Availability

- Mailbox / website / online PFAS-chart tool / intensive stakeholder interaction and webinars / (social) media / podcast
- Reporting on research, data, together with administrations (OVAM, VMM, ...)
- Coördination with administration to streamline communications by all parties, constant dialogue and exchange of information



Questions?

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